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Denmark

Biotechnology

Danish Government Actions Seek to Counter Negative Consumer Opinions 2003

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Report Highlights:

**The Danish Government is initiating activities to allay consumer concerns about
GMOs.**

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
The Hague [NL1], DA

Public Opinion Survey

A recent poll on Danish consumer attitudes towards biotech food revealed that Danish consumers are unwilling to accept GMO food and are willing to pay up to ten percent more for non-GMO food.

Over sixty percent of 1,184 persons interviewed in January 2003 responded no to the question on whether they were willing to buy GMO food. This is unchanged from a 1997 survey.. More than 68 percent responded that they were willing to pay more for non-GMO food compared to 61.1 percent in 1997.

The poll clearly demonstrates that there is no link between more information on GMO's and more positive consumer reactions towards GMO. About 45 percent responded that reducing the use of herbicides and pesticides is a justification for using biotech crops.

The report concludes that the Danes support the positive aspects of biotechnology although the use of GMOs in food is still controversial. GMOs in pharmaceuticals is more widely accepted. The report points out that it is necessary to have consumer participation in decision making for GMO food applications to avoid separating food safety from the political process.

Government Initiatives

The Danish Government is financing a project which aims at communicating biotech knowledge and ethics to the Danes. This project, called "BioTIK" is coordinated within nine Ministries and has a budget of \$4 million.

Projects which aim at promoting a dialogue between consumers, politicians and researchers have initial priority. In order to reach everyone, a panel of 1,000 citizens has been formed to coordinate with experts and participate in decision making concerning GMO applications. Another initiative already launched is education of researchers in improved communication.

The purpose of the initiatives is to bridge the gap between researchers and the Danish population, many of whom are afraid that GMO food is dangerous in the long run. In order to overcome such a complicated and emotionally sensitive subject the debate will be as general as possible, because the population thinks in a completely different manner than researchers.

Thus, the Minister of Food, Ms. Mariann Fisher Boel is being criticized by the Federation of Danish Food Industries as being too cautious concerning the coexistence of GMO and non-GMO crops. The Federation is seeking a clear message from the Minister which would reassure the population of the safety of GMOs.

GMO conference - The American Experience

One of the initiatives of the "BioTIK" is support for a conference on American use of GMO crops. The conference is called "Genetically modified food - The American experience." It is a joint project

between the Center for Bioethics and Risk Assessment at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University and the Secretariat of "BioTIK". It will take place June 12-13, 2003 in Copenhagen.

Experts and specialists from research, agriculture, the public sector and non-governmental organizations will describe the North American experience with large-scale production of genetically modified crops and food. This will then be discussed in connection with the European situation.

The conference will target those who are active in the European debate, specialists and non-specialists: researchers, regulators, politicians, NGO representatives, farmers and the general public.

Comment

The Danish public appears to need more convincing concerning the usefulness and safety of GMO crops for consumers, the environment, biodiversity, etc. The large food processing sector here and farmers are encouraging the Government to do as much as possible to allay consumer fears.